

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

June 6, 2005

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**VIRGINIA DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH RECOMMENDS
WATER SAFETY TIPS**

(RICHMOND, Va.)— As warmer weather fosters more frequent participation in water sports, the Virginia Department of Health (VDH) reminds citizens of the Commonwealth about the importance of water safety, especially for children. Drowning is the leading cause of unintentional injury deaths for Virginians under the age of 14. But it's not just the deep end of the swimming pool that is a hazard. Children can drown in as little as one inch of water.

According to a recent report by the Virginia Medical Examiner's Office, there were 513 confirmed accidental drowning deaths in Virginia between 1999 and 2003. Of those deaths, 101 or 20 percent were children 14 years old or younger. The majority of accidental drownings occurred in the home or at a swimming pool.

"We want to help keep Virginia families safe in and around water this summer," said State Health Commissioner Robert B. Stroube, M.D., M.P.H. "Injury or death from drowning can be avoided if children have active parental supervision, are taught basic water safety skills and parents model positive water safety behavior."

The following safety tips can help keep families safe in and around water this summer.

- Never leave a child alone near a pool, spa, bathtub, toilet, water-filled bucket, pond or any standing body of water.
- An unclimbable, five-foot fence should surround any pool or spa. Fence openings should be no more than four inches wide so children cannot squeeze through the spaces.
- Fence gates should be self-closing and self-latching, with latches above a child's reach.
- Never rely on flotation devices or swimming lessons alone to protect a child. Twenty-five percent of all drowning victims have had swimming lessons.
- Don't allow children to play in the pool or spa area. Never keep toys around or in a pool.
- Avoid swimming after dark.
- Risk for drowning increases in the muddy water of lakes, ponds and rivers.
- Diving into shallow water can cause spinal injuries. Never allow diving in above-ground pools, in shallow water or in water where you don't know the depth.
- Use the buddy system when swimming or boating.
- Require all persons to wear U.S Coast Guard-approved personal flotation devices when involved in water-related recreational activities, regardless of swimming ability.
- Avoid using alcohol or other drugs prior to and during recreational water activities.

For more information about water safety, contact the VDH's Center for Injury and Violence Prevention at 1-800-732-8333 or www.vahealth.org/civp.